DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 183 988 CG 014 201

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TITLE Relative Deprivation Among Secretaries: The Effects of the Token Female Executive.
PUB DATE Sep 79
NOTE 15p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (87th, New York, NY, September 1-5, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrators: Attitudes: Career Ladders: *Females: Occupational Mobility: *Organizational Climate: *Promotion (Occupational): Responses: *Secretaries: *Tokenism

ABSTRACT

It was predicted that the inclusion of token females into executive job classifications would exacerbate feelings of relative deprivation among female secretaries and would therefore create alienated behavior on the part of the secretaries. An opposite pattern was found. Secretarial subjects (N=68) were randomly assigned to an all-male or token-female condition. Subjects in the token-female condition were more satisfied with secretarial and executive pay levels, were less willing to quit, and predicted lower annual turnover rates among secretaries. Subjects in the token-female executive conditions thought that promotions out of the secretarial ranks were both more likely and less desirable. Contrary to predictions, token integration of the executive ranks alleviated relative deprivation among female secretaries and made them more, rather than less, satisfied with their current positions. (Author)

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Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, New York, New York, September, 1979.

CG 014201

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RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AMONG SECRETARIES: THE EFFECTS OF THE TOKEN FEMALE EXECUTIVE

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The first step in alleviating discrimination is often the integration of a few "token" members of the disadvantaged group into the more advantaged group. There is considerable evidence that tokens are often stereotyped by observers (Taylor et al., in press) and by members of the advantaged group (Kanter, 1977). We know less about how disadvantaged people react when some of the members of their own group become tokens in advantaged groups, a topic which is the focus of the present study.

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Although theorists differ, most agree on the central components of the following definition: relative deprivation occurs when a person compares his/her outcomes, such as pay, to the outcomes received by another person or group and when s/he decides that the comparison is both dissatisfying and unjust (Crosby, 1976). Runciman (1966) has drawn an interesting distinction between two types of relative deprivation: egoistic and fraternal. Egoistic deprivation is dissatisfaction and perceived injustice stemming from a comparison to someone of similar economic status. Fraternal deprivation is dissatisfaction and perceived injustice based on a comparison between one's own group and a group of higher economic status.

Data which can be interpreted as indicative of egoistic deprivation has been collected by both relative deprivation and equity researchers (Patchen, 1961; Homans, 1974; Crosby, 1976). Fraternal deprivation, however,

may be a more interesting phenomena. First, it occurs less frequently than egoistic deprivation. Even when comparisons to more prosperous groups do cause dissatisfaction, one essential component of fraternal deprivation is often missing; often people do not judge the difference in prosperity to be unjust (Martin, 1978). When people do experience fraternal deprivation, there is considerable evidence that this may have dramatic behavioral effects. Fraternal deprivation is associated with behaviors designed to change the political/economic system which has been perceived as unjust, by voting, by peaceful protest, or, if such methods appear to be futile, by participation in violent riots (Crawford and Naditch, 1970; Sears and McConahay, 1970; Vanneman and Pettigrew, 1972).

Economic status, however, is not the only dimension relevant to comparisons of outcomes. Input dimensions, such as sex, education, or work experience, are also relevant (Patchen, 1961; Suls and Miller, 1977).

Let us assume that a person chooses a comparison to someone of dissimilar economic or job status, but of similar sex, and finds that comparison to be both dissatisfying and unjust. Is this egoistic deprivation, because the sex is similar, or is it fraternal, because the economic or job status is dissimilar? Previous research has focused on indicators of economic status, such as job status or class identification. No relative deprivation research, to my knowledge, has systematically focused on the effects of comparisons that are similar on one dimension and dissimilar on another. Deprivation arising from such a mixed comparison will, in this paper, be labeled as mixed fraternal deprivation, thereby giving dominance to the dissimilarity of the economic status dimension, since this dimension is of greater theoretical importance than the sex dimension within relative deprivation theory.

Secretaries in large corporations may be an ideal subject population for studying these issues, for the following reasons. Many low level jobs, such as secretarial jobs, are associated with chronic complaints concerning the tedium of some of the work, low financial rewards, and the lack of promotion opportunities. Frustration, dissatisfaction, low quality performance, and high turnover are associated with these job characteristics (Kanter, 1975). Relative deprivation theory may well provide an informative approach for studying these morale problems and their behavioral effects. Secretaries may well feel both egoistic deprivation (in relation to other, better-paid secretaries) and fraternal deprivation (focusing on the difference between secretarial and executive pay rates).

Secretarial jobs have traditionally been sex segregated: male executives and female secretaries. Therefore, comparisons by secretaries to executive pay levels would usually require secretaries to select a comparative referent with a double dose of dissimilarity, both in terms of job classification and sex. However, what would happen to secretarial pay comparison choices and feelings of relative deprivation if the executive ranks were partially integrated with a few token females? This would provide an opportunity for mixed fraternal deprivation to occur, as at least some of the executives would be similar in terms of sex, although dissimilar in terms of job classification. How would such token integration of the executive ranks, and the predicted upward comparisons, affect secretaries' feelings about their work and pay?

PREDICTIONS

Two alternate patterns of results were considered; relative deprivation among the secretaries could be either exacerbated or reduced. It

was predicted that secretarial feelings of deprivation would be exacerbated by the presence of token female executives. The presence of the token female executive, it was predicted, would make the lack of promotion opportunities even more frustrating; "why should that woman hold an executive position while, as a secretary, my aspirations for upward mobility are frustrated?"

Lack of access to the executive ranks would, it was predicted, strengthen the existing frustration with secretarial jobs and pay levels. Thus, the presence of a token female executive was predicted to exacerbate egoistic and mixed fraternal deprivation among the secretarial subjects. Such deprivation, it was predicted, would be associated with alienated behavior, so that secretaries would be less likely to work hard and more likely to quit if females were admitted to the executive ranks. In summary, token integration would bring frustration and perhaps rebellion or exit by members of the lower paid group.

The alternate pattern of reaction, which was not predicted to occur, was that token integration would reduce the frustrations of the secretaries. The presence of the token would, according to this alternative hypothesis, be taken to indicate that upward mobility out of the secretarial ranks was possible, thereby lessening dissatisfaction and the perception of injustice regarding both secretarial and executive pay scales. Satisfaction with the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards would increase in the presence of token female executives, and alienated behavior, such as poor performance or quitting, would be less likely. In summary, integration would bring contentment for members of the lower paid group, provided that aspirations for upward mobility could be fulfilled.

METHOD

Subjects:

The volunteer subjects were 68 female secretaries at a large West Coast insurance company.

Procedure:

The subjects watched a slide and tape presentation which realistically described two jobs at another organization: a secretarial job and an executive job. The subjects were told that if they were to work at this company, they would be hired as secretaries and would receive the average pay rate for secretaries there. These jobs and pay levels were virtually identical to the jobs and pay levels of the subjects themselves. The subjects were also told that if they were to work as secretaries at the company portrayed in the slide and tape presentation, they would actually work for the individual executives shown in the slides. This instruction was designed to increase the subjects' involvement with the slide and tape presentation. Subjects were then asked a number of questions about how they would feel about being a secretary, earning the average pay for secretaries, at this other company.

Experimental Manipulation of Executive Sex Ratios:

Subjects were randomly assigned to view one of two slide and tape presentations. The tape recording used in the two presentations was the same, and in each presentation slides of three female secretaries and three executives were shown. In one condition all three of the executives were male (all male) and in the other condition (token female) one of the three executives was female.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed using analysis of variance of a two-by-two factorial design. The first factor was the sex ratio of the executives - either all-male or token female. The second factor, used as a blocking variable, was a measure of attitudes about women in business (Spence, 1973), which was used to split subjects into two groups - feminists and traditionals. Results involving the second independent variable were, with one exception, main effects, with feminists expressing more frustration of various types in the all-male condition. Due to lack of space, the results concerning this blocking variable will not be discussed further here.

The experimental manipulation of executive sex ratios was successful as indicated by responses to an item asking recall of the demographic characteristics (age, sex, etc.) of the executives. In the all-male condition subjects recalled, on the average, that 99.7% of the executives were male. In the token female condition, it was estimated, on the average, that 74.6% of the executives were male; in fact, only two of the three slides of executives had portrayed males in the token female condition. This difference between the conditions, in recalled percentage of male executives, was significant (t=9.29; 34 d.f., P<.001).

Contrary to predictions, the presence of token female executives reduced relative deprivation among the secretaries. The relative deprivation data are presented in Table 1. Secretaries in the token condition were significantly more satisfied with secretarial pay rates (F=5.20; (1,63) df; P<.03), showed a non-significant tendency to find those secretarial pay rates to be more just, were slightly more satisfied with comparisons to executive pay rates (F=3.87; (1,63) df; P<.06), and showed a

non-significant tendency to find those executive pay rates to be more just. In short, both egoistic and fraternal deprivation were reduced rather than exacerbated, contrary to the predicted pattern of results.

As would be expected then, the secretaries felt that alienated behavior would be less likely to occur in the token female executive condition. The means are presented in Table 2. The subjects predicted secretaries in the token female executive condition would require significantly more money to quit their jobs ($F=4.13$; $(1,63)df$; $P<.05$), and would have significantly lower turnover rates ($F=5.48$, $(1,63)df$, $P<.03$). Although subjects in both conditions thought secretaries would work hard, as indicated by means above the midpoint of the scale, lower performance levels might be a problem in the token female executive condition. The subjects in this condition thought that secretaries would work significantly less hard ($F=6.12$; $(1,63)df$; $P<.03$). It is possible that the results for these two measures of predicted behavior are related; secretaries may be predicting lower turnover rates in the token female executive condition because secretaries in this condition would not work as hard.

Another explanation for these behaviorial prediction results would focus on the likelihood and desirability of promotion out of the secretarial ranks. These means are presented in Table 3. As predicted, subjects in the token female executive condition rated promotions into the executive ranks at the company in the slide presentation as significantly more likely for "a secretary" ($F=18.98$; $(1,63)df$; $P<.001$) and for themselves personally ($F=13.92$; $(1,63)df$; $P<.001$). In direct contradiction to predictions, however, subjects in the token female condition rated both non-secretarial promotions ($F=5.58$; $(1,63)df$; $P<.03$) and promotions

into the executive ranks at the company in the slide presentation ($F=4.71$; $(1,63)df$; $P<.04$), to be significantly less desirable in the token female executive condition. Clearly, the improvements in job and pay satisfaction in the token female executive condition are not based on the secretaries' desires to become executives themselves.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to predictions, token integration of the executive ranks appears to reduce secretaries' frustrations with their job and pay. The presence of token female executives made secretaries more, rather than less, satisfied with both secretarial and executive pay levels. In other words, no evidence of either egoistic or fraternal deprivation is found. Congruent with this finding, the likelihood of alienated behavior, such as turnover, is less in the presence of token female executives. Integration of the executive ranks makes promotion out of a secretarial position more likely - a fact which may explain the increased satisfaction with existing pay differentials. The finding which is most puzzling is that the presence of token female executives makes promotions out of the secretarial ranks less desirable. One explanation for this finding, derived from reactance theory, is that once a promotion is likely, it is less desirable. Perversely, we may not want what we can have. A second, and related, explanation is that when such a promotion is feasible, perhaps secretaries begin to consider the costs, such as increased pressure and longer hours, associated with such positions.

If replicated in other organizational settings, these results can be interpreted as profoundly discouraging to those feminists who hope that token integration of executive ranks will increase secretaries' opportunities and desire for promotions. Instead, ironically, we found

such integration increased secretaries' satisfaction with the status quo.

Table 1: The Effects of Executive Sex Ratios on Secretarial Pay Dissatisfaction and Perceptions of Injustice (Relative Deprivation)

Measures of:	Executive Sex Ratio: All-Male	Executive Sex Ratio: Token Female
Egoistic Deprivation in Relation to Other Secretaries		
Dissatisfaction[a]	3.34	4.49
Perceived Injustice	3.94	4.78
Fraternal Deprivation in Relation to Executives		
Dissatisfaction	2.28	3.00
Perceived Injustice	2.78	3.40

[a]Low scores indicate dissatisfaction and perceived injustice.

Table 2: The Effects of Executive Sex Ratios on Secretarial Behavioral Predictions

	Executive Sex Ratio	
	All-Male	Token Female
Measures of Predicted Behavior[a]:		
How hard secretaries work	7.28	6.58
How much more money to quit job	$251/month	$267/month
Estimated annual turnover among secretaries	46.09%	32.47%

[a] Higher numbers indicate secretaries would work harder, would require more money before quitting, and would estimate higher turnover rates.

Table 3: The Effects of Executive Sex Ratios on Secretarial Attitudes About Promotion

	Executive Sex Ratios	
	All-Male	Token Female
Measures of Promotion Attitudes[a]:		
Likelihood of Executive Promotion for a Secretary	2.39	4.51
Likelihood of Executive Promotion for Subject Personally	2.34	4.44
Interest in Non-secretarial Promotion	8.09	7.00
Desire for Executive Promotion	7.00	5.75

[a]Higher numbers indicate promotions are more desirable and more likely.

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